

POSSESSIVE FAULT

"I love being a writer. What I can't stand is the paperwork." - Peter de Vries

The grammar outlaw: Possessive Fault

The grammar crime: Indicating possession is not a crime in itself; however, inappropriately indicating possession is.

Outlaw	Innocent
Jenna and Morris walked they're four dogs every day.	Jenna and Morris walked their four dogs every day.
The dog's leashes usually became tangled.	The dogs' leashes usually became tangled.

Question: How do we know a sentence incorrectly indicates possession?

The clues: When you look at a sentence, there are six areas in which you may find a grammar outlaw. The following are the general rules for the categories.

1. Singular nouns

- To show possession, always add an 's to the noun.

Outlaw	Innocent
Jennas favourite dog was chubby.	Jenna's favourite dog was chubby.
Morris' favourite was more muscled.	Morris's favourite was more muscled.

2. Plural nouns

- If the word neither ends with an S, nor with an S or Z sound, then add 's.
- If the word ends with an S, or with an S or Z sound, then add an apostrophe.

Outlaw	Innocent
The dogs would often run on other peoples' lawns.	The dogs would often run on other people's lawns.
When that happened, Jenna would take away the four dogs's privileges.	When that happened, Jenna would take away the four dogs' privileges.

3. Compound Nouns

- “Mother-in-law” is an example of a compound noun. When changing the noun into its possessive form, place the apostrophe after “law.”

Outlaw	Innocent
Jenna’s brother’s-in-law dog was mean.	Jenna’s brother-in-law’s dog was mean.

4. Joint ownership

- When two or more people own something, you only put the possessive on the last noun.

Innocent: Jenna and Morris’s dogs were friendly.

- When Jenna owns her dogs separately from Morris, use the possessive on both nouns.

Innocent: Jenna’s and Morris’s dogs were friendly.

5. Possessive pronouns

- The proper forms of the possessive are as follows:

I	my	mine
you	your	yours
she	her	hers
he	his	his
us	our	ours
they	their	theirs
it	its	its

Outlaw	Innocent
Clyde is you’re dog. He is your’s .	Clyde is your dog. He is yours .
Snowball is they’re dog. He is their’s .	Snowball is their dog. He is theirs .
The dog preferred it’s black leash.	The dog preferred its black leash.

Notes:

- None of these possessive pronouns use apostrophes.
- Do not confuse the possessive pronouns with the following contractions:
 - * it’s = it is
 - * you’re = you are
 - * they’re = they are
 - * her’s = not a word

6. Indefinite pronouns (e.g., one, somebody, else)

- These forms use an apostrophe.

Outlaw	Innocent
Somebody elses dog must have chased your garden.	Somebody else's dog must have chased your garden.
One should buy ones own food.	One should buy one's own food.